

**RI Marine Fisheries Council
Scup/Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel
Meeting Minutes
January 19, 2012, 6:00 PM
URI Bay Campus, Coastal Institute**

W. Macintosh, Chairman	G. Tremblay*
K. Court ^A	D. Pesante*
J. Barker	J. McNamee, DFW staff

(*primary advisory panel member; ^A alternate member)

W. Macintosh began the meeting. He stated that J. McNamee of the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW or Division) had a presentation which covered the first 7 agenda topics and was broken in to a scup section followed by a black sea bass section. He stated that after each section of the presentation the panel would discuss any proposals they may have for recreational management for scup or black sea bass in 2012. He noted that there was not a quorum present therefore no votes would be taken, but it still would be useful to get some advice from the panel out to the RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) and the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

J. McNamee began with a discussion about stock status for scup. The stock was rebuilt and overfishing was not occurring. He then went over the fishery performance in RI in 2011. The fishery went well in 2011. Given the high coastwide quota for scup in 2011, the fact that the preliminary indications were that the recreational fishery would have a large underage, and the fact that there would most likely be an underage on the commercial side of the harvest as well, the managers from the northern region (scup is managed through a regional approach for the recreational fishery rather than state by state) decided to keep the fishery open through the end of the year even though it had been set to close in the fishery management plan. Even with this unscheduled opening, the fishery still came in under target and the northern region was looking at a 100+% liberalization in 2012. J. McNamee concluded by stating that the DFW would approve any option that remained within the liberalization strategy as developed by ASMFC and the northern region partners. He went on to outline a few of the potential options, which are noted in the slideshow (attached).

W. Mackintosh asked the group if they had any questions. K. Court mentioned that the information on whether a fishermen was in state or federal waters, which is information collected through the MRFSS survey, was biased because he felt that the average fisherman, especially one on a charter boat, didn't know if they were in state or federal waters. He hoped this could be passed on to the appropriate people so they could perhaps pose the question better to improve the information. He then went on to propose a set of regulations. K. Court wondered if the following would meet the liberalization restrictions:

Party and Charter remain at 11", have a bonus season from September 1st through December 31, and have a 10 fish limit during the period when the rest of the fishery was operating.

J. McNamee stated that he would have to check, but thought that it was pretty close to some of the options the northern region technical committee members were working on. K. Court concluded his statement by indicating that having the closed period in the fall was detrimental to the party and charter industry, especially when New York boats with RSA were coming in to RI waters and fishing. J. McNamee stated that even if they have RSA, this doesn't mean they are permitted to fish outside of the open season so he suggested if people see this in the future that they report this to DEM Enforcement.

J. Barker stated that he felt keeping the season open was the most important consideration, and then increasing the bag limit was a secondary consideration in his view.

J. McNamee then went through a discussion about the black sea bass fishery. The stock was rebuilt and overfishing was not occurring according to the only peer reviewed stock assessment available, but J. McNamee then went on to describe the situation that recently occurred with the benchmark assessment, the result of which was the assessment was rejected. He then went over the fishery performance in RI in 2011. The fishery went well in 2011, and this was a year where RI was operating under Addendum XXI and had its own management plan. The fishery came in under target by roughly 16%. J. McNamee stated that there was currently an Addendum out for public comment and this Addendum (XXII) was looking to set up either a state by state or regional option for black sea bass management in 2012, similar to what was in place for 2011. J. McNamee concluded by stating that the DFW would approve any option that remained within the liberalization strategy as developed by ASMFC, but depended on the approach taken by the management board, i.e. regional or state by state. He went on to outline a few of the potential options, which are noted in the slideshow (attached).

W. Mackintosh went to the group for discussion. K. Court commented that joining a region was dangerous as they had experienced with scup. He felt that the harvest was so high in NY and NJ that if they went over their targets, they could shut down the rest of the coastwide fishery. He stated that he preferred a state by state approach even though it meant a smaller liberalization. He went on to say that extending the season would be a priority for him as a party and charter representative. He also mentioned that lining up the seasonal dates with the commercial fishery was an important consideration and he felt the 12 fish would not create much of a targeted fishery but would allow the party and charter vessels to decrease their black sea bass discards when prosecuting other fisheries.

J. Barker stated that the uncertainty made the choice very difficult for him.

W. Mackintosh stated that as biomass increased, interest in this fishery would increase as well, so this should be considered when setting regulations.

W. Mackintosh went on to talk about some meeting logistics. He stated that there was not a quorum present, therefore they would not be voting on anything. He went on to state that due to the consistent low turnout with this panel they needed to make some changes,

he mentioned combining with the summer flounder panel as one alternative. K. Court stated that he preferred this as it mirrored the ASMFC management plan and would cut down on the number of separate meetings. J. Barker stated that he thought it was OK to go up by one more species, but more than that would be problematic. As well, some of the other panels did not have these same problems, citing the striped bass panel as one example. There was also discussion on reducing the membership size of the panels as another approach to increasing the chances of having a quorum.

The panel discussed the advisory panel process a bit more. They also had a side discussion on the data flow from MRFSS. The panel members hoped that this could happen quicker so that they were not always so backed up in to the decision making process. J. McNamee agreed with this and stated that during some of the revamping that was going on with the MRFSS program, this was one item that was discussed so there may be some improvement on this in the future.

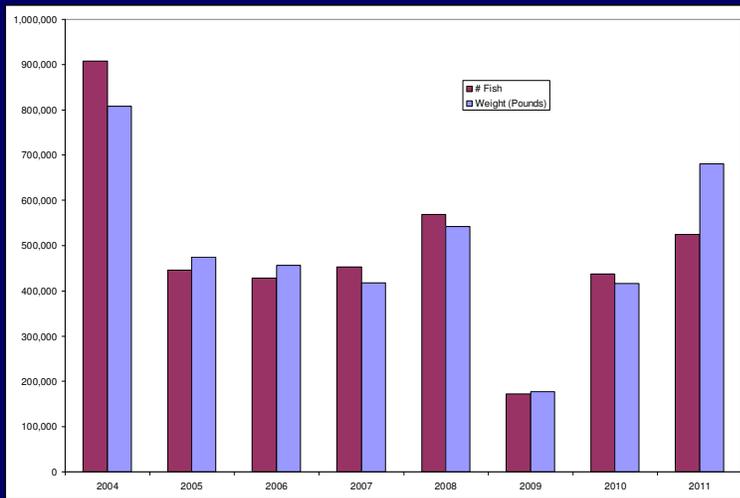
W. Mackintosh adjourned the meeting.

Summary of Rhode Island Recreational Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery

2011



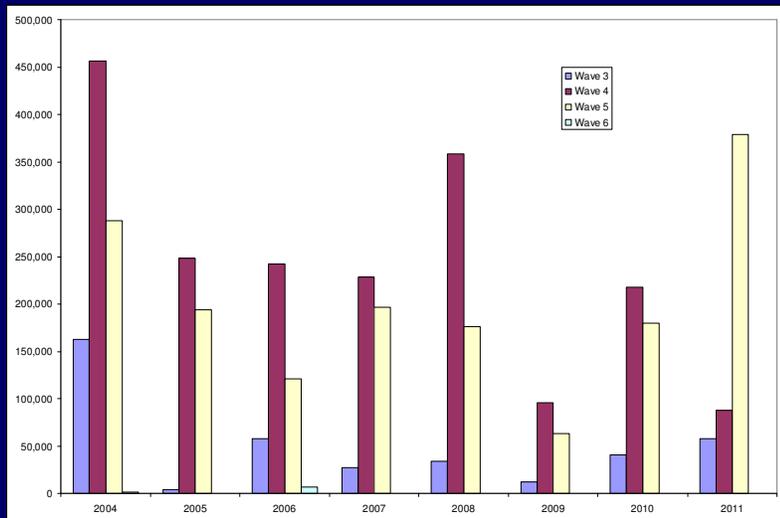
Recreational Landings - Scup



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data



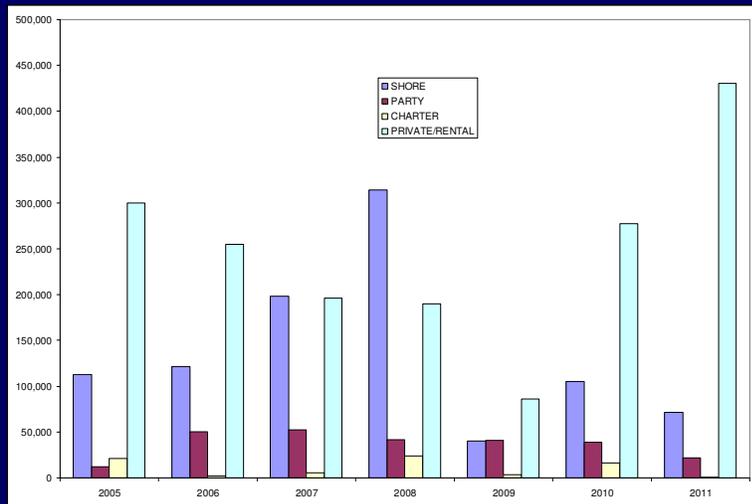
Recreational Landings - Scup – Harvest by Waves



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data



Recreational Landings - Scup – Harvest by Mode



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data



RI Recreational Fishery Performance - Scup

- ◆ Landings and targets are analyzed on a regional basis in the scup fishery. Our region is MA – NY
- ◆ The landings target for 2011 for this region was 4,727,288 fish
- ◆ The projected landings in 2011 for the region are 2,036,927 fish
- ◆ This is approximately a 130% underage



Scup Stock Status

- ◆ At the December 2008 Northeast Data Poor Stocks Peer Review a new scup assessment approach was implemented. The new model is called an age-structured assessment program (ASAP)
- ◆ This scup stock assessment model uses widely-accepted and commonly-used fishery science principles to analyze the population size.
- ◆ Scup is no longer considered a data poor stock, however, there are still gaps in information that will need to be addressed through improved data collection and fish sampling programs.
- ◆ The fishing mortality rate estimated for 2010 is 0.040, which is below the fishing mortality threshold reference point $F_{40\%}$ (0.177).
- ◆ Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be 186,262 mt in 2010, which is above the biomass target of 92,044 mt (SSB $_{40\%}$).
- ◆ The stock is considered rebuilt and the stock is not considered overfished and is not currently experiencing overfishing.



Scup 2011 Recreational Management Measures

- ◆ Party Charter:
 - ◆ Minimum size = 11"
 - ◆ Season: June 8 - September 6 at 10 fish
 - ◆ Season: September 7 – October 11 at 40 fish
- ◆ General category
 - ◆ Minimum size = 10.5"
 - ◆ Possession Limit of 10 fish
 - ◆ Open Season: May 24 - September 26
- ◆ Prior to the fishery closing on Sept 26 in 2011, the four state region took action to keep the fishery open at the lower 10 fish limit until December 31. This was done due to projected large underages.



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife approves liberalizing recreational regulations for 2012.

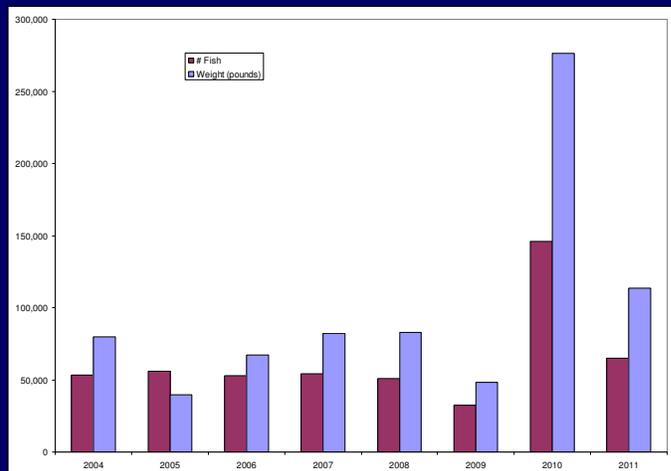
These liberalization will be made to meet compliance requirements of ASMFC and the Northern Regional target

The scup management board has not met at this point but some of the options being explored are to:

- Keep the season expanded as in 2011
- Potentially develop one plan for all modes with consistent bag limits and minimum sizes
- Expand the general fishery season with bonus season expansion incorporated

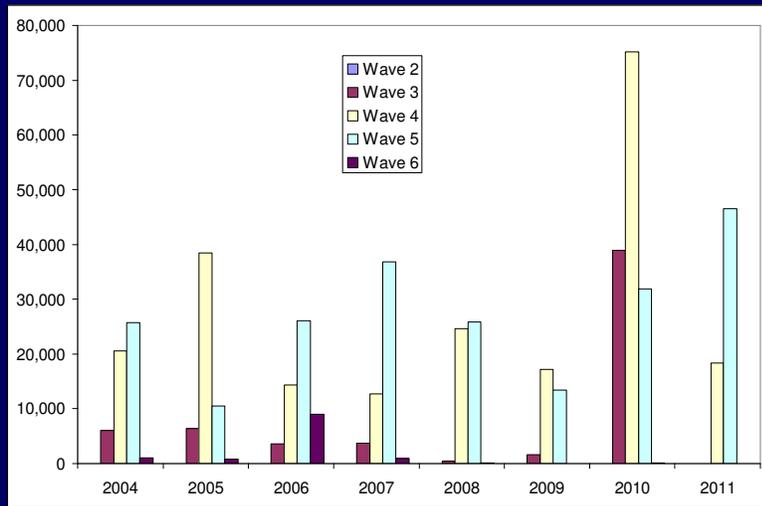


Recreational Landings – Black Sea Bass



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data

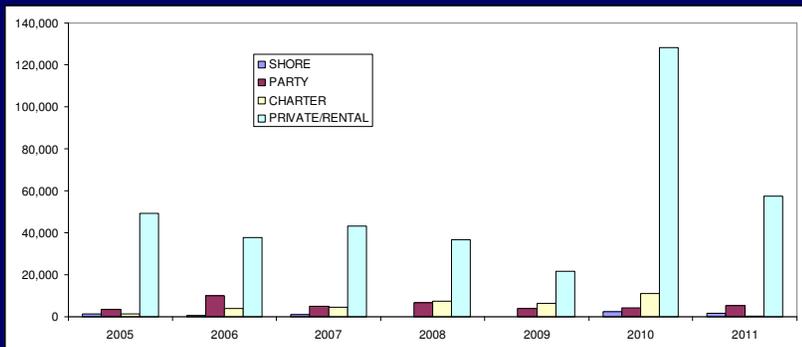
Recreational Landings – Black Sea Bass – Harvest by Waves



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data



Recreational Landings – Black Sea Bass – Harvest by Mode



*Note: 2011 data is preliminary, no wave 6 data



RI Recreational Fishery Performance – Black Sea Bass

- ◆ Landings and targets were analyzed on a coastwide basis in the recreational Black Sea Bass fishery until 2011
- ◆ The landings had been at or under harvest targets since 2002 until 2009, where the harvest target was exceeded by 104%
- ◆ The coastwide landings in 2010 were projected to be 3.12 million lbs while the harvest limit was 1.83 million lbs. This represented a 70% overage, thus instigating ASMFC Addendum XXI
- ◆ Addendum XXI set forth state-by-state measures allowing the southern states to remain at status quo regulations and allowing northern states to tailor their reductions in a way that best suited each individual state
- ◆ Addendum XXI was in place for 2011, and a similar Addendum is being brought forward for 2012, Addendum XXII
- ◆ The crux of the problem is and remains an exceptionally small quota, for what appears to be a healthy stock, which currently remains in place for 2012



Black Sea Bass Stock Status

- ◆ The limited information on black sea bass was integrated into a mathematical model called a statistical catch at length model (SCALE).
- ◆ Despite the applied modeling approach it is still considered a “data poor” stock. There are still gaps in critical life history information for black sea bass and the current sampling gear may not be optimal to assess the population.
- ◆ A benchmark assessment was performed in December of 2011 which integrated updated and new biological research as well as additional fishery independent information in to a statistical catch at age model (ASAP). This assessment was rejected by the peer review panel.
- ◆ The December 2008 data poor stock peer review set the rebuilding goal as 27.6 million pounds of spawning stock biomass, to be achieved by January 1, 2010. The current spawning stock size is at or above the biomass goal based on both assessment models.
- ◆ Because of the recent rejection of the benchmark assessment, and the fact that the peer review panel did not have time to review the updated SCALE model, the stock assessment default back to the original SCALE configuration.
- ◆ The process moving forward regarding stock assessment of black sea bass is unclear at this point.



Black Sea Bass 2011 Recreational Management Measures

- ◆ Minimum size = 13"
- ◆ Possession Limit of 12 Fish
- ◆ Open Season: July 11 – December 31



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife approves of any option that will be compliant as determined by ASMFC

Current options out for public review:

Status quo: 13", 12 fish bag, July 11 – December 31

State-by-state: RI gets 16% liberalization

Regional (MA – NJ): Region gets 57% liberalization

Regional (MA – NY): Region gets 45% liberalization

